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31th
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 7, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "KITCHEN KNIVES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A

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Have you ever noticed that the most useful kitchen utensil of all is often the poorest tool in the kitchen? I'm referring to the knife. You can scarcely prepare a single meal without a knife, yet this is often the tool that we choose most carelessly and treat the worst.

But any cook will save time and trouble by using the right knife for the job and keeping her knives in the very best condition, ready to be of service when she needs them.

Suppose now that we go into this knife question seriously. What knives does the everyday home kitchen need? Well, suppose you're the cook. You'll need a butcher knife, a bread knife, probably two or three good paring knives, a wide spatula and a narrow one, and some convenient kitchen scissors. If you want to save yourself time and work, you'll keep your knife collection in convenient reach of your work table. And you'll keep them all sharp, of course, except the spatulas which have flat, flexible blades, unsharpened. Perhaps the handiest place for knives in the kitchen is a wall knife-rack. That keeps them in much better condition than knocking about loose in a drawer with a lot of other utensils. The small son in your family can easily make one of these wooden racks in his carpentry class at school. It's just a straight piece of wood with slits or grooves in it to slip the knives in. Knives kept in racks remain sharp longer because their blades don't come in contact with other things that would dull them.

Suppose you go shopping for kitchen knives? How will you know a good knife when you see one? Well, a good knife has a handle of the right size and shape to be comfortable in your hand -- large enough so it doesn't cramp your fingers yet small enough so you can get a good grip on it. Second point: a good knife has the proper balance between the blade and the handle. This not only gives more comfort in using but it also gives quicker, more even cutting strokes. The third point to remember about a good knife is that the blade is of high quality steel. And the fourth point is that the blade is riveted to the handle.

Good steel is a paying investment in a knife, because it gives a better edge and will keep sharp longer than cheap steel. We lucky housewives today don't have to spend hours scouring our kitchen knives as our grandmothers did because we can own stainless steel knives that neither rust nor tarnish.

And, speaking of a sharp edge, you'll find many good knife sharpeners on the market now. Be sure to buy one that isn't too rough, that won't hurt the edge of the blade. Some sharpeners will chip the cutting edge even though they make it temporarily sharper. That's the reason that many people still prefer the old-fashioned whetstone. They think it's still the best and safest sharpener.

Now for special points to look for in different kinds of knives. First, the slicing knife that you'll use for cake and cold meats. This needs a long tapering point and a flexible blade so that it will slice thin with little pressure. But a carving knife which you use to cut hot meat must be firmer and stronger. It should have a shorter blade and a thicker one. A good bread knife has a firm blade with a fine saw-tooth or notched edge.

Now about paring knives. You'll find several kinds and shapes on the market. Generally, the one that does the best job has a short, straight blade and a handle that fits the curve of your hand -- is about the same size and shape. That kind of handle is most comfortable.

As for spatulas, you'll want two, as we said. The large one -- about three by five inches -- you'll use for turning griddle cakes or meat balls or for slipping cookies off a baking sheet. Then you'll need a narrow spatula, one about three fourths of an inch wide by six inches long, for icing cakes, scraping batter from the mixing bowl, and numerous other little scraping or spreading jobs.

As for the kitchen scissors, you'll use these to shred lettuce or other salad greens, to dice marshmallows or dried fruit, especially raisins, to cut up or "string" string beans, to remove the centers from grape fruit, and to do lots of other little jobs extra-quick. And by the way, remember when you're cutting any sticky food, that a wet blade prevents the food from clinging. Dip your knife or your scissor blade in either hot or cold water before you do the cutting.

Here's one more knife idea. A covered knife is often a convenience. To cut individual pats of butter, for example, cover the blade of your knife with a piece of waxed paper. You can use the paper in which the butter was packed. Hold the ends of the paper in one hand and cut with the other. This keeps the butter from sticking to the knife.

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